

# ASEAN and African relations: towards a renewed partnership ?

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*'Bandung spirit offers solutions to 21st century global ills'* <sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** The ASEAN summit of October 2021 showed the increased geopolitical importance of the Indo-Pacific realm. Today ASEAN is the most successful regional organization in Asia and the second largest worldwide behind the EU. The establishment of the New Asian-African Strategic Partnership (NAASP) more than 15 years before (2005) aimed to revive the Bandung spirit of the non-aligned movement of 1955. This time with a stronger focus on economic ties. In 2013 these countries counted around 620 million inhabitants or 8.8% of the world population. They wanted to fight colonialism and neocolonialism by promoting Afro-Asiatic economic and cultural cooperation. Almost all member countries gained sovereignty and political independence by the 1960s and 1970s, except for Palestine. However, the aftermath of the Bandung conference also promoted negative developments, including the polarization of Asian countries, the strengthening of political authoritarianism, and regional interventions. In addition, most countries continued to grapple with economic and political challenges, including poverty, debt burdens, backwardness, ignorance, disease, and environmental degradation. Their access to the markets of the industrialized countries also remained limited. At the global level, the NAASP received little attention so far. Despite the longstanding rhetoric of Asia-Africa solidarity, Asia and Africa still lack formal institutional and trade links. Although interregional trade increased, Africa remained a small part of ASEAN with only around 2% of its total market. The most important trading countries of ASEAN with Africa were Thailand, Indonesia, and Singapore, while South Africa, Nigeria, and Egypt were the largest African import markets.

**Keywords:** [ASEAN](#), [NAASP](#), [Asia](#), [Africa](#), [economic growth](#), [international trade](#), [free trade area](#), [customs union](#), [Non-Aligned Movement](#), [Indonesia](#), [South Africa](#), [Thailand](#), [Singapore](#), [Nigeria](#), [Egypt](#)

**JEL-code:** F13, F15, F36, F54, N15, N17, O17, O19, O53, O55, Z13

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<sup>2</sup> 'Bandung Spirit offers solutions to 21st-century global ills', by Mammo Muchie and Yan Hui. Shanghai Daily, April 27, 2015. Source: Cartoon Popular & China Internet Information Center, [China.org.en](#), 2015

## 1. Introduction

ASEAN constitutes one of the largest and most important [free trade areas \(FTA\)](#) worldwide. It is the most successful regional organization in Asia and globally the second largest behind the EU. Its leaders created, in close cooperation with international partners, some of the world's largest multilateral forums and blocs, including [Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation](#), [East Asia Summit](#), and [Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership](#). Altogether, ASEAN is made up of ten member states, [Brunei](#), [Cambodia](#), [Indonesia](#), [Laos](#), [Malaysia](#), [Myanmar](#), the [Philippines](#), [Singapore](#), [Thailand](#), and [Vietnam](#) ([ASEAN Free Trade Area](#), Wikipedia). These countries counted around 620 million inhabitants or 8.8 % of the world population (in 2013).

The worldwide attention for the three-day (virtual) summit of the *Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)* from 26 to 28 October 2021, chaired by the Sultanate of [Brunei](#), showed the increased geopolitical importance of the [Indo-Pacific](#) space. Yet, ASEAN rejected to be perceived just because of the strategic competition between the USA and China. Many feared to become the grass being trampled under the feet of fighting elephants in an increasing confrontation or even a new cold war (Fähnders, 2021). However, not all Southeast Asian states were equally alarmed by China's rising power. After all, China was also ASEAN's largest trading partner. Among others, ASEAN participated in China's new [Belt and Road Initiative \(new silk road\)](#), and trade agreements, like the [Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership](#) (RCEP), signed by 15 Asia-Pacific countries in November 2020, including the ten ASEAN members as well as China, South Korea, Japan, New Zealand, and Australia. It was said to be the world's largest free trade deal (Xinhua, 2021)<sup>3</sup>.

**Map 1:** ASEAN's 10 member states 2021



Source: ASEAN (orthographic projection),

<sup>3</sup> Ratifications of at least six ASEAN member states and three non-ASEAN member countries were needed to reach the threshold for RCEP to enter into force. Countries that up to now completed the ratification procedures include China, Brunei, Thailand, Singapore, Japan, and Cambodia.

The differences in the political systems, between democratic and autocratic regimes, apparently played a lesser role for Southeast Asians than for example for Europeans.

However, the October summit was overshadowed by an unprecedented move. [Myanmar's](#) military chief, [Min Aung Hlaing](#), who had toppled the civilian government on 1 February 2021, was barred from participating in the summit. This was the most severe sanction that ASEAN had ever handed to a member state. The reason for this unusual measure of ASEAN, hitherto known for its [non-interference policy](#), was the failure of Myanmar's military regime to implement the peace plan agreed upon with ASEAN in April to end the bloody crisis that had triggered the coup (Aljazeera, 2021). The coup had ended Myanmar's short-lived democracy experiment. Nobel Prize winner [Aung San Suu Kyi](#), who had served as Prime minister (State Counsellor of Myanmar) and minister of foreign affairs from 2016 to 2021, now faced a junta court with possible heavy sentences. Myanmar had joined the association in 1997 under a previous military government.

Besides the Myanmar crisis, issues on the summit's agenda included the controversial Chinese demands concerning the [South China Sea](#) where [Beijing](#) had turned small islands and atolls into military bases in the past decade. Yet, China, Vietnam, and other Southeast Asian countries had overlapping claims. Finally, the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic was discussed. The meetings in Brunei were taking place online due to Corona-related travel restrictions. Significantly, US president, Joe Biden, who wanted to rally support in the region against a rising China, also took part in a US-ASEAN summit on 26 October as well as in a summit including Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and other world leaders on 27 October 2021. (France-24, 2021).

The historical roots of ASEAN were laid after [World War II](#) by the [Bandung Conference](#), the first large-scale Afro-Asian Conference, organized by Indonesia, Myanmar (Burma), Ceylon (Sri Lanka), India, and Pakistan from April 18–24, 1955, in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. The 29 nations participating at the Bandung Conference were concerned about the implications of the Cold War. With their pronounced opposition to colonialism and advocating for political neutralism, they established the [Nonaligned Movement](#). On the 50th anniversary of the Bandung conference in 2005, Asian and African leaders, enlightened by the '*Spirit of Bandung*', met again in Bandung and Jakarta, launching the [New Asian-African Strategic Partnership](#) (NAASP) to promote a new strategic political, economic, and cultural cooperation between the two continents (Alatas, 2005; Albert, 2021). At the global level, the NAASP received little attention so far, in contrast to Asia's trade relations with other continents, which crystallized in institutions such as the [Asia-Europe Meeting](#) (ASEM) and the [Forum of East Asia-Latin America Cooperation](#) (FEALAC) (GIS-Asie, 2016).

Could it be that the international lack of attention for the NAASP was mainly because the new Asian-African strategic cooperation turned out to be a dead letter, a paper tiger, because of lacking political determination on both sides? Will there be any realistic chances to improve ASEAN-Africa relations in the foreseeable future?

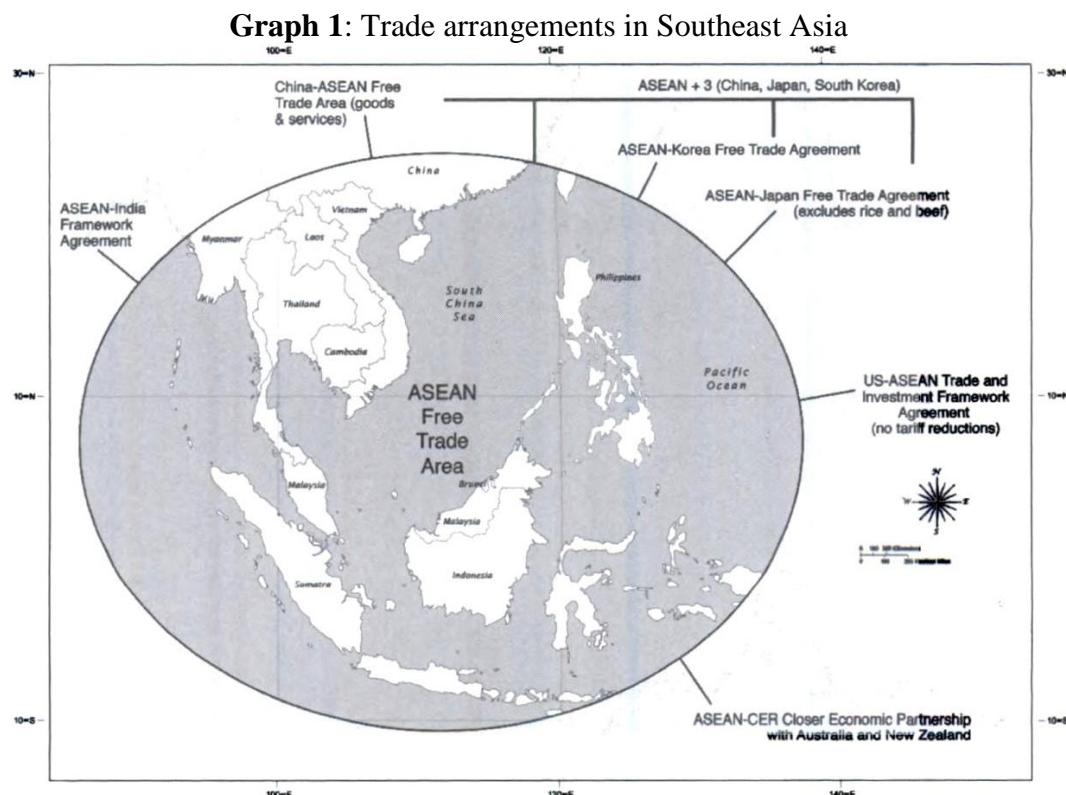
In the following, answers to these questions will be discussed. However, analyzing the economic performance of ASEAN member states in Africa had been hindered up to now by ASEAN's and Africa's pronounced political, economical, social, and cultural diversity. [Singapore's](#) GDP per capita, for example, was about 50 times higher than that of [Cambodia](#) and [Myanmar](#), and 30 times that of [Laos](#). Indonesia represented almost 40 % of ASEAN's economic output, whereas Myanmar was still in the process of institution-building. Therefore

any attempt to analyze interactions of political players one-dimensionally would be misleading (Vaidyanathan, 2016). Investigating the performance through case studies, as in the following approach, might be a valuable alternative to illustrate major tendencies of development of ASEAN – African partnership and trade relations.

After a short overview on the history of ASEAN-African relations, with a focus on trade relations and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), a succinct history of the performance of the NAASP will be given. Subsequently, in depth case studies of selected major ASEAN and African countries as well as the impact of African migration to ASEAN allow for investigating in the perspectives of ASEAN-African cooperation.

## 2. Succinct history of Asean – Africa relations

ASEAN constitutes one of the largest and most important [free trade areas \(FTA\)](#) worldwide. It is the most successful regional organization in Asia and globally the second largest behind the EU. Its leaders created, in close cooperation with international partners, some of the world's largest multilateral forums and blocs, including [Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation](#), [East Asia Summit](#), and [Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership](#). Altogether, ASEAN is made up of ten member states, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam ([ASEAN Free Trade Area](#), Wikipedia). In 2013 these countries counted around 620 million inhabitants or 8.8% of the world population.



Source: [ASEAN Free Trade Area](#), en.Wikipedia, [National Defense University Press](#)<sup>4</sup> -

<sup>4</sup> Source: Vaughn, B., McDonald, S. M., Clad, J., National Defense University. Center for Strategic Research. (2011). The borderlands of Southeast Asia: geopolitics, terrorism, and globalization. Washington, D.C.: Published for the Center for Strategic Research, Institute for National Strategic Studies by National Defense University Press.

However, the aftermath of the Bandung conference also promoted negative developments, including the polarization of Asian countries, the strengthening of political authoritarianism, and regional interventions. In addition, many countries continued to grapple with economic and political challenges, including poverty, debt burdens, backwardness, ignorance, disease, and environmental degradation. Also, their access to the markets of the industrialized countries remained limited (GIS-Asie, 2016). Political divisions between ASEAN member states were largely based on the specific founding history of the association, particularly differences between the first members and newcomers. The first members were [Middle-Income Countries](#) (MICs) and at least partly democratic (Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia), whereas the latecomers were rather authoritarian (Burma and Vietnam) and poorer. The latter objected to the non-interference policy of the former and preferred to focus on foreign aid, and not so much on trade. These discords weakened the alliance in international negotiations and gave the impression that ASEAN had lost its drive and agency ([Association des nations de l'Asie du Sud-Est](#) (ANASE), wikipédia).

## *2.1 ASEAN – African trade an FDI development*

ASEAN-Africa trade developed from just US\$2.8 billion in 1990 to US\$42.5 billion in 2012, thus growing on average 14 % p.a. This has made Africa the second-fastest-growing continent for ASEAN trade other than Asia (GIS-Asie, 2016).

Although ASEAN countries were still major recipients of FDI, they evolved into an emerging source of investment for many developing economies, especially within the ASEAN region. The overall FDI outflow from ASEAN rose rapidly from US\$ 8.97 billion in 2000 to US\$ 56.36 billion in 2013 (Sermcheep, 2017). Concerning FDI, ASEAN was the third-largest investor in Africa, according to the Thai government. However, this did not seem to match with UNCTAD's World Investment Reports that revealed the United States, France, the United Kingdom and China as the most significant FDI contributors in Africa by country. In terms of total capital invested (including investment in infrastructure projects), China remained the most significant FDI contributor to Africa. During the 2014 – 2018 period, China invested funds of more than US\$72 billion in Africa, creating more than 137,000 jobs. Apart from that, investment patterns were mainly due to historical ties. For example, France remained a key investor in francophone regions in Africa where it still had a comparative advantage because of established political and economic relations and a common language and culture. Furthermore, FDI in Africa decreased by 16 % during the Corona pandemic, in 2020 (AFR-IX, 2021).

Jakarta operated embassies in Morocco, Egypt, Senegal, Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, and Mozambique, together with a consulate in Madagascar (Tarrosy. 2018). Thus, Africa became also a destination for investment from ASEAN. Foreign direct investment (FDI) from Singapore for example reached US\$ 15.9 billion in 2012, making it ASEAN's largest investor in Africa, and Malaysia and Indonesia followed suit (GIS-Asie, 2016).

**Table 1:** ASEAN trade in goods (IMTS) with 10 major African countries

No.	Country	total	Export	import
1	South Africa (ZA)	7.338.065.274	4.424.809.492	2.913.255.782
2	Nigeria (NG)	4.683.244.760	1.592.137.328	3.091.107.432
3	Egypt (EG)	3.499.758.664	3.000.856.725	492.901.939

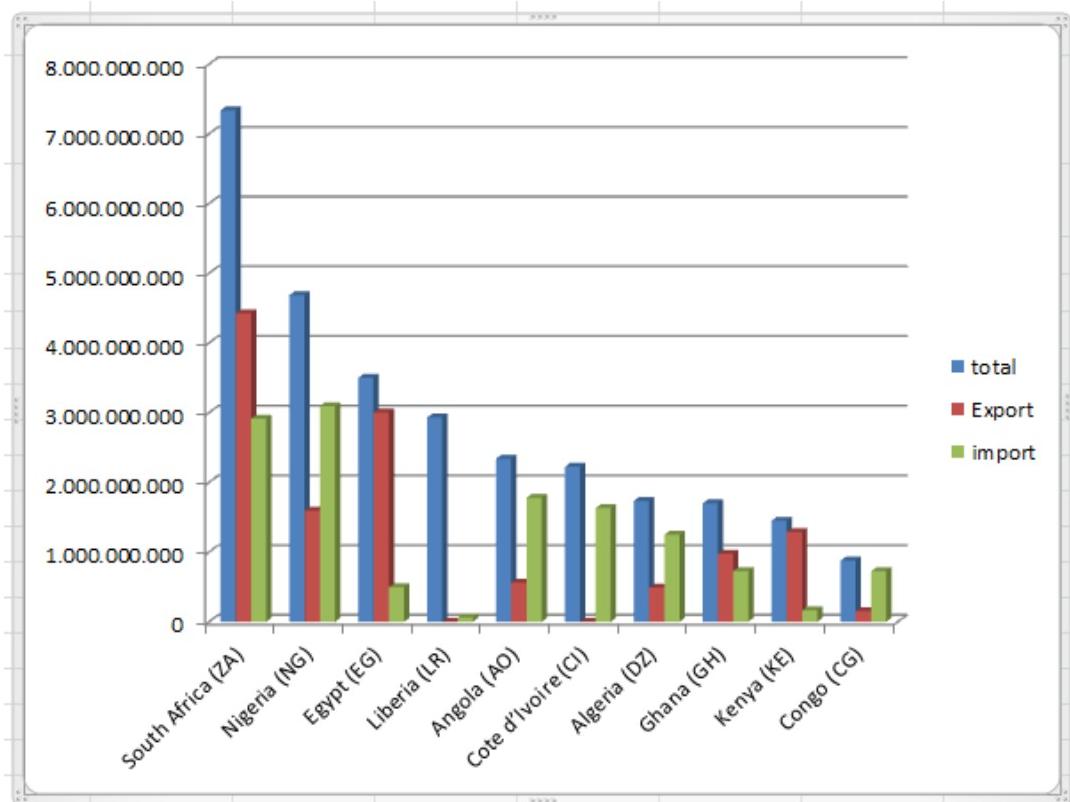
4	Liberia (LR)	2.930.721.629	2.872.239.149.	58.482.480
5	Angola (AO)	2.338.073.583	558.596.150	1.779.477.433
6	Cote d'Ivoire (CI)	2.221.365.534	593301.371	1.628.064.163
7	Algeria (DZ)	1.733.920.297	487.549.380	1.246.370.917
8	Ghana (GH)	1.698.348.242	973.145.057	725.203.185
9	Kenya (KE)	1.448.655.917	1.286.770.155	161.885.762
10	Congo (CG)	875.640.994	149.630.498	726.010.496

ASEAN exports and imports in 2020, all commodities, in US\$

Source: [ASEAN Stats Data Portal](#)

More than 200 ASEAN companies operated in Africa, mainly in sectors like agribusiness, manufacturing, oil, and urban development. However, all in all, the African market remained small, with 1.7 % of ASEAN's total in 2012. The major ASEAN trading nations with Africa were Thailand (US\$11.6 billion), Indonesia (US\$10.7 billion), and Singapore (US\$9.5 billion) (GIF-Asie, 2016). On the African side, South Africa, Nigeria, and Egypt had the largest overall commodity trade with ASEAN (see Table 1). Seven ASEAN states created the ASEAN-Pretoria Committee to boost trade with South Africa. Besides, Viet Nam, Cambodia, and Laos strengthened economic ties with French-speaking African countries within the framework of the [Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie](#) (OIF) (GIF-Asie, 2016).

**Graph 2:** ASEAN trade in goods (IMTS) with 10 major African countries



ASEAN exports and imports in 2020, all commodities, in US\$

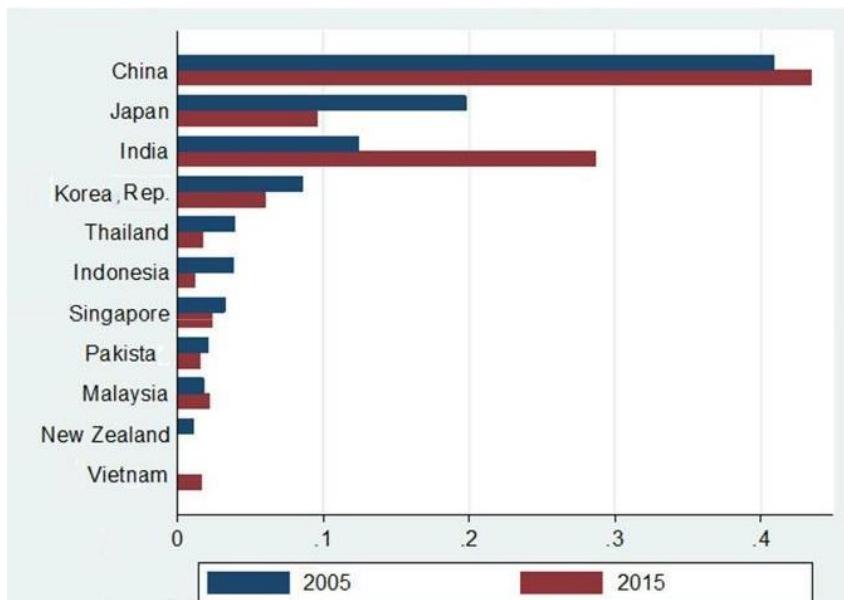
Source: [ASEAN Stats Data Portal](#)

Although China had become the dominant trade partner of most African countries, ASEAN member countries, like Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam figured also among the top 10 Asian destinations of African exports over the past two decades (Graph 3). Thereby, each African country had a distinct main trade partner in Asia. Thereby, African exports to Asia were positively correlated with exports to the rest of the world. This suggested

that in contrast to trade diversion, African trade with Asia complemented exports to other countries (Tang & Zeng & Zeufac, 2020).

According to general opinion, regional integration in South East Asia was driven by markets and private economic initiatives, whereas regional integration in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) was promoted rather by African leaders and states with self-interested political intentions and few results. However, this might be misleading, at least concerning the supposedly dominant role of the market in the developing process of ASEAN.

**Graph 2:** Top 11 African exports for Asian destinations  
2005 and 2015 (share)



Source: IfW (Kiel) calculations, data from CEPII's BACI World Trade database  
Tang, et al (2020)

Most likely, the political agency of Japan in promoting regional trade in its hemisphere was a decisive base for ASEAN's success. According to Coulibaly (Coulibaly, 2020), Tokyo followed the [Flying Geese paradigm](#), developed already before World War II (1937), by Kaname Akamatsu, a Japanese scholar. The paradigm focused on how development could be promoted in Southeast Asia by Japan as a leading regional anchor. One of Akamatsu's scholars, the Japanese economist Kiyoshi Kojima, proposed in the 1980s that regional agreements along the *Flying Geese paradigm* could help facilitate technology transfers and productivity growth. This laid the theoretical foundations for the [Pacific Trade and Development Conference](#) and the [Pacific Economic Cooperation Council](#) (PECC) in 1980 and finally for the [Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation APEC](#) in 1989 (Coulibaly, 2020; Austine, 2019). Linkages between activities of Japanese multinational corporations in East Asia, for example, by subcontracting, licensing, joint ventures, and foreign direct investment (FDI), apparently resulted in a *win-win* situation for both Japan and ASEAN nations. FDI started to grow in the 1970s and substantially increased in the mid-1980s. This facilitated Japan's economic restructuring while simultaneously aiding the structural transformation of many ASEAN countries.

Secondly, African countries could learn from the pivotal role of family businesses in ASEAN's development process (Coulibaly, 2020). Big, diversified, family-owned

corporations were, for example, crucial players in the [ASEAN Plus Three](#) (APT) that consists of ASEAN member states plus China, Japan, and South Korea. It started in December 1997 and was institutionalized in 1999. In these companies, the family was often the basic unit of management. This allowed for speedy decisions, loyalty, flexibility, and lower overheads. Last, but not least, it guaranteed trust, which is decisive in business transactions, notably in political settings with weak governance (Coulibaly, 2020).

## 2.2 Performance of the New Asia-Africa Strategic Partnership (NAASP)

ASEAN addressed its differences in development as well as dissimilar levels of preparedness to open up markets, by implementing differentiation through a multi-speed mechanism. Pushed by Malaysia, the most ‘backward’ member, the formula was labeled within the framework of the liberalization of the service sector in 2002 the “*10 minus X principle*”. Later on, it was named the “*ASEAN Minus X formula*” and thus became enshrined in the ASEAN Charter (Gaens, et al, 2020). Examples were abounding. Thus, multi-speed figured prominently in the “*Protocol to Amend the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services*” in 2003, as well as in the implementation of the ASEAN Single Aviation Market, authorized in 2011. Differentiation, therefore, was a recurrent feature of ASEAN integration, proving ASEAN's diversity as well as its focus on intergovernmentalism and inclusion, and thus provided allows for progress in regional integration (Gaens, et al, 2020).

The [New Asian-African Strategic Partnership](#) (NAASP) was founded on the Asian-African Summit in 2005, attended by 106 countries, including 54 Asian and 52 African countries. It aimed to revive the spirit of the [Bandung conference](#) of the [non-aligned movement](#) of 1955. However, in contrast to the 1950s, almost all member countries had gained sovereignty and political independence already by the 1960s and 1970s, except for [Palestine](#), still under [Israeli occupation](#). This time, the member states introduced a stronger focus on economic ties. Based on international political solidarity, they wanted to fight [post- and neocolonialism](#) by promoting Afro-Asiatic economic and socio-cultural cooperation. On a follow-up conference in Jakarta on 12 to 13 October 2009, the NAASP discussed a proposal for focus areas of cooperation. The latter, however, were not necessarily centered on economic issues, i.e counter-terrorism, combating transnational organized crime, food- and energy security, [small and medium enterprises](#) (SME's), tourism, Asian-African development university network, gender equality, and women empowerment ([NAASP](#), wikipedia).

Yet, since then, the NAASP made little progress. Although the NAASP-Declaration stated that the already existing Afro-Asian development initiatives for Africa, such as the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD), the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), or the India-Africa Summit Forum (IASF) would be complemented by the NAASP, it was difficult to make that aim operational to the benefit of all parties involved (Tarrósy, 2016). For example, there was no institutionalized representation of African partners in ASEAN's external relations. Critics argued that both sides, especially the ASEAN, ought to overcome first barriers to the development of its relations with African countries by truly securing the political will and engagement, before the implementation of NAASP's 'strategic partnership' envisioned in 2005, and by the formation of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) established in 2015 during the 27th ASEAN Summit in [Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia](#). The emphasis on continent-country cooperation continued to hamper the long-standing aim of formalizing NAASP. Until then, NAASP risked subsisting only pro forma (Dlamini, 2019).

### 3. Case studies

#### 3.1 Indonesian - African trade relations

Africa as a trading partner was still for many Indonesian private entrepreneurs rather far-off. Nevertheless, Indonesia's trade with African countries was hedged by a growing diplomatic presence. First diplomatic relations with Nigeria, the major trading partner, were already established in 1965 when Jakarta opened an embassy in Lagos. Nigeria was also the first SSA nation to establish an embassy in Jakarta in 1976 (Tarrósy, 2016). In 2016, [Jakarta](#) had 16 embassies in Africa, namely 6 in Northern Africa, i.e. in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, and 10 in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Senegal, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Madagascar. Besides, it runs a Consulate-General in [Cape Town](#), a trade attaché in [Cairo](#), and two Indonesia Trade Promotion Centres (ITPC), one in [Lagos](#), and another in [Johannesburg](#) (Tarrósy, 2016).

**Graph 3:** 10 major African trading partners for Indonesia in 2014  
(in million USD)

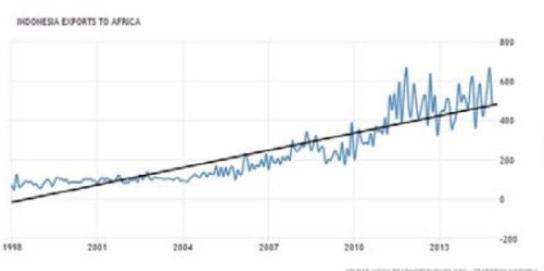
Country	Exports	Imports	Total Trade Value
Nigeria	648.61	3,306.30	3,954.91
South Africa	1,379.50	498.49	1,877.99
Egypt	1,341.00	145.93	1,486.93
Algeria	178.64	299.72	478.36
Angola	189.66	209.28	398.94
Djibouti	306.82	0.27	307.09
Benin	213.11	31.10	244.21
Ghana	212.27	28.72	240.99
Morocco	82.19	140.26	222.45
Tanzania	202.49	19.65	222.14

(Source: Indonesia Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS),  
Processed by Ministry of Trade)

Source: Tarrósy, 2016

**Graph 4:** Growth of Indonesian exports to Africa, 1998 to 2016  
(in million USD)

*Indonesian exports to Africa between 1998 and 2016 (in million USD)*



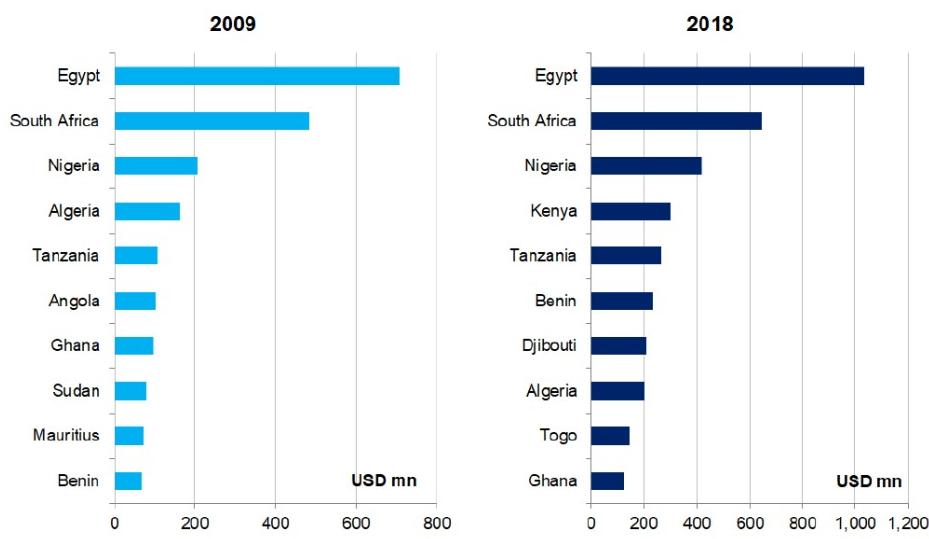
(Source: [www.tradingeconomics.com](http://www.tradingeconomics.com) / Statistics Indonesia)

Source: Tarrósy, 2016

Nigeria was by far the most important trading partner, because Indonesia relied on Nigerian crude oil imports, followed by South Africa and Egypt. Other Nigerian exports to Indonesia included cotton and leather raw materials. Indonesia's exports to Nigeria, on the other hand, focus on palm oil, paper products, pharmaceuticals, car parts, soaps, and electronic products. Also, more than 15 Indonesian companies were operating in Nigeria. One of them was *Indofood* which established an instant noodle factory in Nigeria, the largest such plant in Africa.

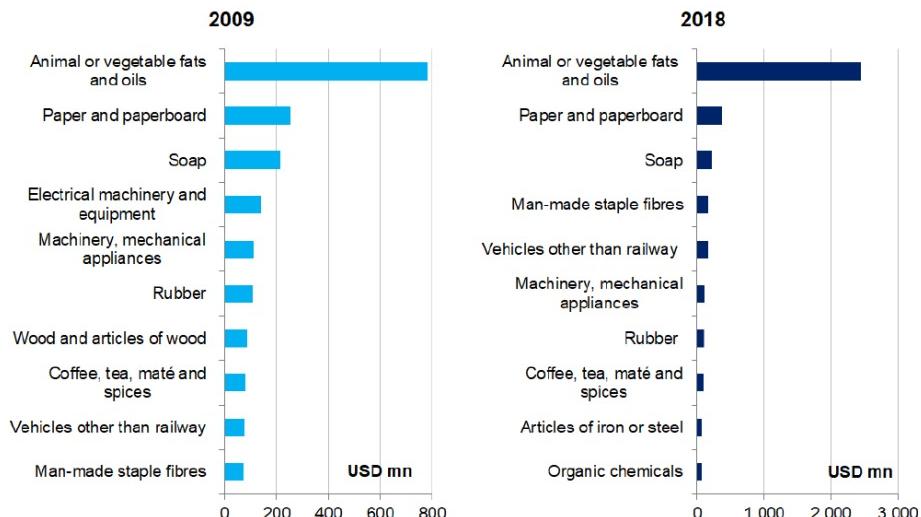
Jakarta promoted market diversification, notably for its 'non-oil-and-gas products', such as palm oil and linked products, textiles, footwear, cars and car components, and electronics. The top 13 fastest-growing SSA export markets for Indonesia by 2014 were the Central African Republic, Somalia, Mauritania, Djibouti, Mozambique, Kenya, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Congo, and South Africa (Tarrós, 2016).

**Graph 5:** Top Indonesian exports by African country, 2009 and 2018



Source: Tanuwidjaja & Handy, 2021

**Graph 6:** Indonesian top 10 exports to Africa by product classification

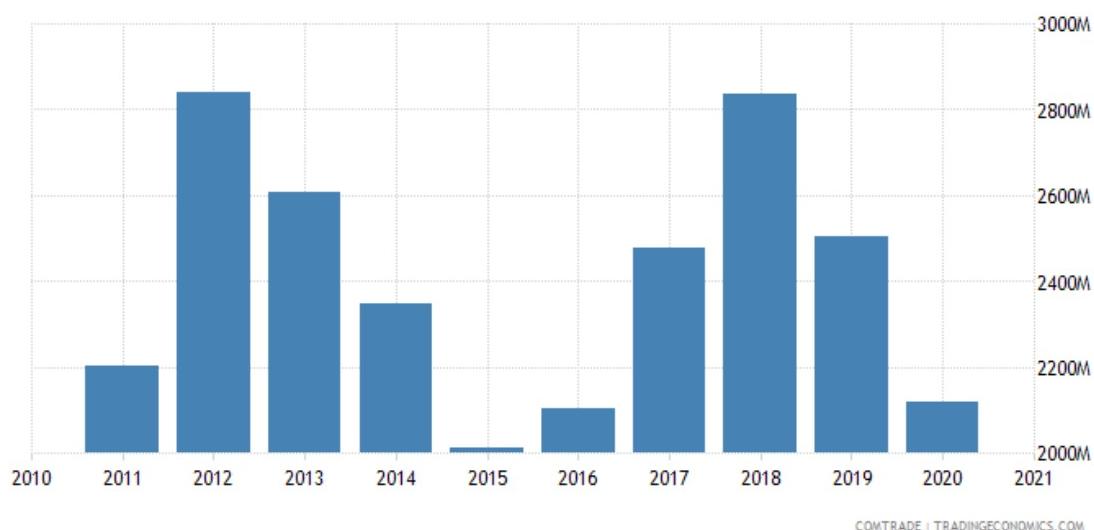


Source: International Trade Centre (ITC) database

### 3.2 Thailand - Africa trade relations

The share of Thailand's imports by continent was just 2% for Africa in 2020, according to the UN-COMTRADE database on international trade. Angola, the first African import trading partner of Thailand, figured only in the 25<sup>th</sup> place of import countries. Thailand's exports by continent were slightly more important, with 2,4% in 2020. South Africa was the most important export trading partner, in the 21st position of the most important export trading partners ([Trading Economics](#), 2021).

**Graph 7:** Thailand exports to South Africa, 2010 - 2021

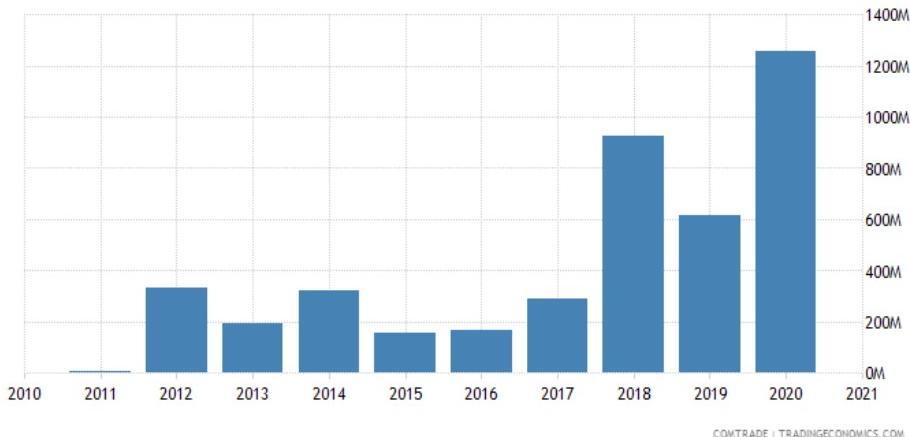


Source: [Trading Economics](#), Thailand – South Africa

**Graph 8:** Thailand exports to South Africa, categories, 2020

Thailand Exports to South Africa	Value	Year
Vehicles other than railway, tramway	\$540.06M	2020
Machinery, nuclear reactors, boilers	\$494.33M	2020
Cereals	\$315.26M	2020
Electrical, electronic equipment	\$158.62M	2020
Rubbers	\$105.77M	2020
Articles of iron or steel	\$78.38M	2020
Plastics	\$63.53M	2020
Meat, fish and seafood preparations	\$57.62M	2020
Organic chemicals	\$41.99M	2020
Optical, photo, technical, medical apparatus	\$37.45M	2020

**Graph 9:** Thailand's imports from Angola



Source: [Trading Economics](#)

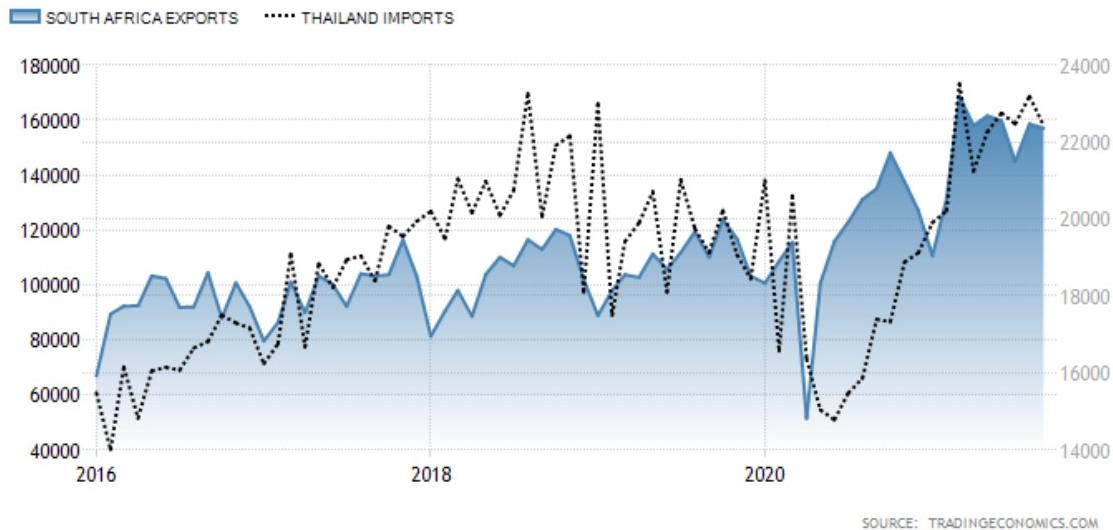
Since the 2010s, Jakarta opened a new diplomatic orientation focusing on Africa. Thus, within the framework of the “*Look West Policy*” in 2013, a Thai–Africa partnership for sustainable development had been launched to increase engagement beyond the country’s immediate Asian neighborhood, with the Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA) acting as a key organization on behalf of the government. By 2017 this initiative had been redefined to mean “prioritizing development cooperation based on trust, equality and mutual interests with African countries” (Tarrosy. 2018). At that time, Thailand was ASEAN’s most important trade partner with Africa and the biggest supplier of rice to the continent (Tarrosy. 2018).

ASEAN was the third-largest investor (FDI) in Africa, according to the Thai government. Yet, there remained substantial obstacles to Thai investment in Africa. Prominent among them was the uncertainty about the risks and opportunities offered by this vast market. For example, the only publicly listed Thai pharmaceutical company dealing with sub-Saharan markets was *Mega*, operating on a small but slowly accelerating scale in Kenya since the late 1990s. The company gradually scaled up its operations in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda. Further expansions were planned in Ethiopia and Sudan (Dhawan, 2017).

### 3.3 South Africa - ASEAN trade relations

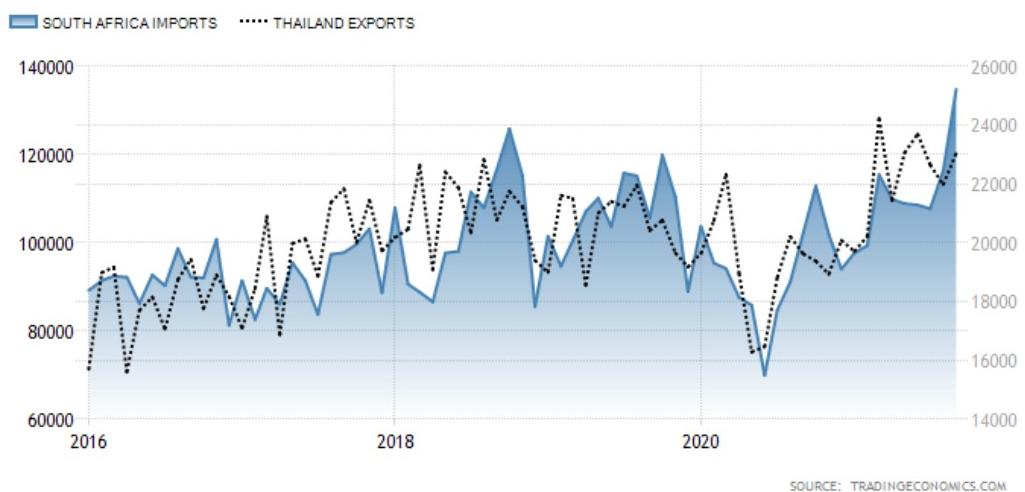
South Africa’s main trading partners in Asia were China (18.3 %), and, by a large margin, Thailand (see above). Although South Africa’s exports to Asia were highest with 34 % among South Africa’s export continents, against Europe (28 %), Inner-Africa (26 %), and the Americas (11 %), ASEAN countries figured low ([Trading Economics](#)). In 2020, total trade between South Africa and ASEAN was over US\$7 billion p.a., with ASEAN enjoying a trade surplus. South Africa’s largest ASEAN trading partners were Singapore, Thailand, and Indonesia. South African companies mainly exported organic chemicals, inorganic chemicals, metallic ores, horticulture, and iron and steel. They imported mostly textiles and garments, footwear, electronic goods, refined petroleum oils, automotive products, and palm oil (Medina, 2020).

**Graph 10:** South African exports vs. Thailand's imports, 2012 – 2020



Source: ([Trading Economics](#))

**Graph 11:** South African imports vs. Thailand's exports, 2012 – 2020



Source: ([Trading Economics](#))

In general, there was no lack of well-intentioned declaration, but its implementation was short in supply. On 19 November 2020 Pretoria joined ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC). The TAC was a peace treaty signed already in 1976 between ASEAN members to establish a set of guidelines to govern inter-state relations in the region. South Africa was only the third African country that had signed the treaty after Egypt and Morocco. In 2012, Pretoria and Jakarta agreed to enhance bilateral relations and to conduct a joint study to explore trade opportunities by signing a Joint Trade Committee (JTC) in Jakarta. The same has been said about other key ASEAN states. The ASEAN Pretoria Committee (APC), a committee of diplomats representing the interest of ASEAN member states in South Africa, met in 2014 to discuss ways of strengthening multifaceted cooperation between ASEAN and South Africa (Dlamini, 2021). Pretoria, however, was at pains to make both ends meet, i.e. to find a way to take advantage of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), within the current legal framework, in the

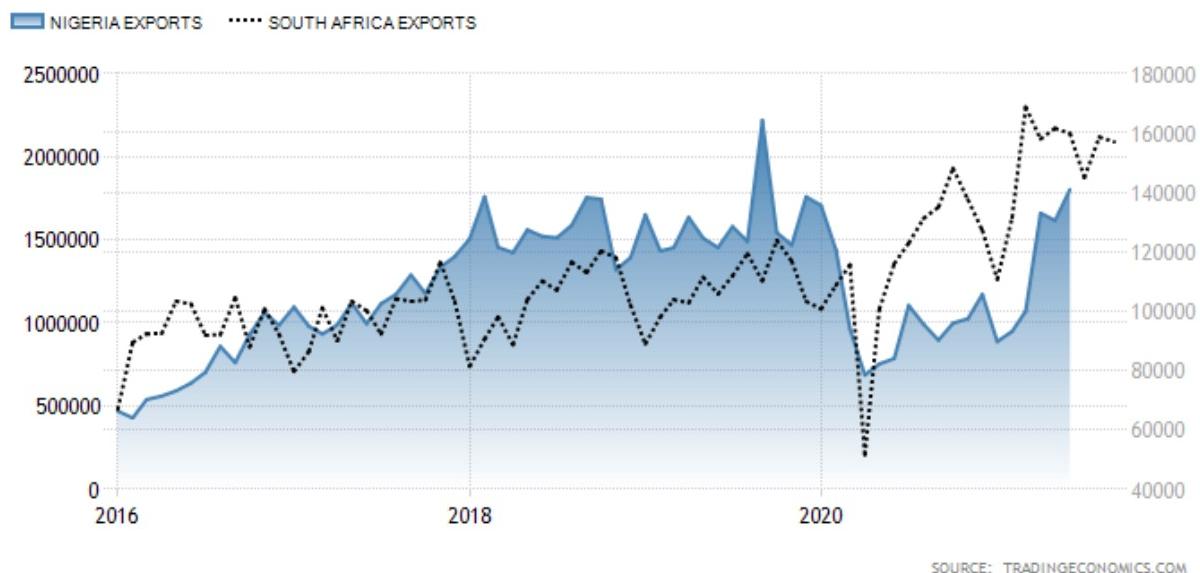
Southern African Customs Union (SACU), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and ultimately within the AfCFTA (Fisher, 2020).

Moreover, South Africa had more realistic export opportunities for example to trade with Thailand than vice versa (both in terms of the absolute number of available opportunities and the potential ‘untapped value thereof) (Rensburg, 2019). Thailand figured as 7<sup>th</sup> country on the ranking of South Africa imports by country with USD 2.14 billion in 2020. Vietnam counted as the 25th export country with USD 602 m in 2020. As for South Africa's imports, 47 % arrived from Vietnam ([Trading Economics](#)).

### 3.4 Nigeria - ASEAN trade relations

Exports of commodities (oil and natural gas) had been Nigeria's major engine of growth and government revenue since the 1960s. It accounted for more than 91 % of total exports. In 2014, 43 % of total sales went to Europe; 29 % to Asia; 13 % to America, and 12 % to Africa. ([Trading Economics](#)). Bilateral trade relations between Nigeria and the ASEAN block reached US\$ 7.7 billion in 2017 (Okeh, 2018). Nigerian and South African exports, in general, moved in the same direction. However, during the Corona crisis, Nigerian exports lacked behind.

**Graph 12:** Nigerian and South African exports, 2012 – 2020

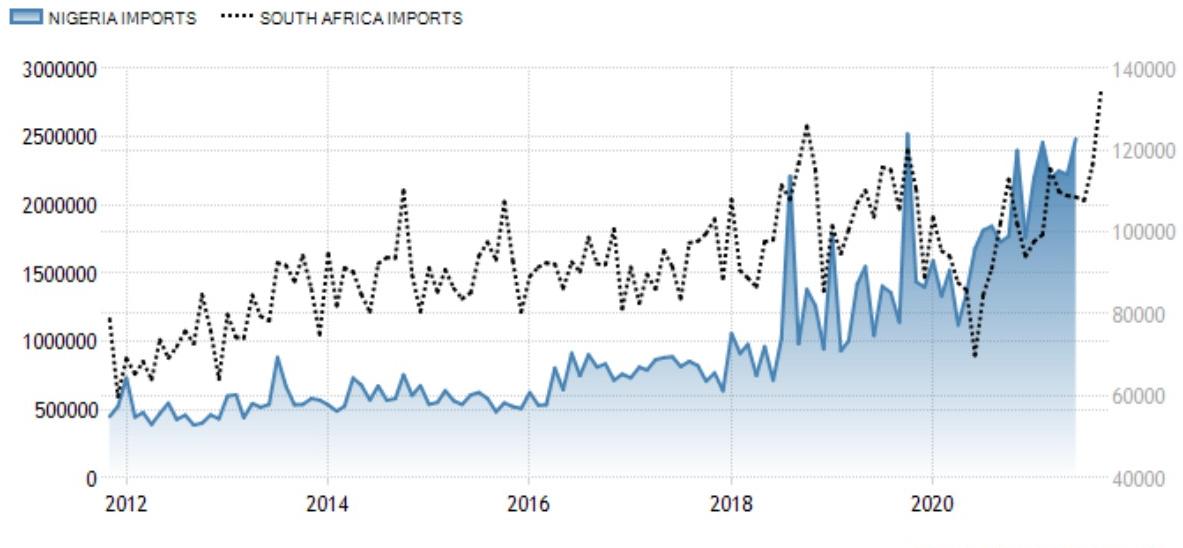


SOURCE: TRADINGECONOMICS.COM

Source: ([Trading Economics](#))

Nigeria imports consisted mainly of industrial supplies (27 % of total in 2014), capital goods (23 %), food and beverage (17 %), fuel and lubricants (14 %), transport equipment and parts (12 %), and consumer goods (7 %). Most imports (43 %) came from Asia, predominantly China, but also from ASEAN member countries; 34 % from Europe; 15 % from America, and 7 % from Africa. Although Nigeria's imports were in general significantly lower than that of South Africa, they soared to about the same level during the Corona crisis.

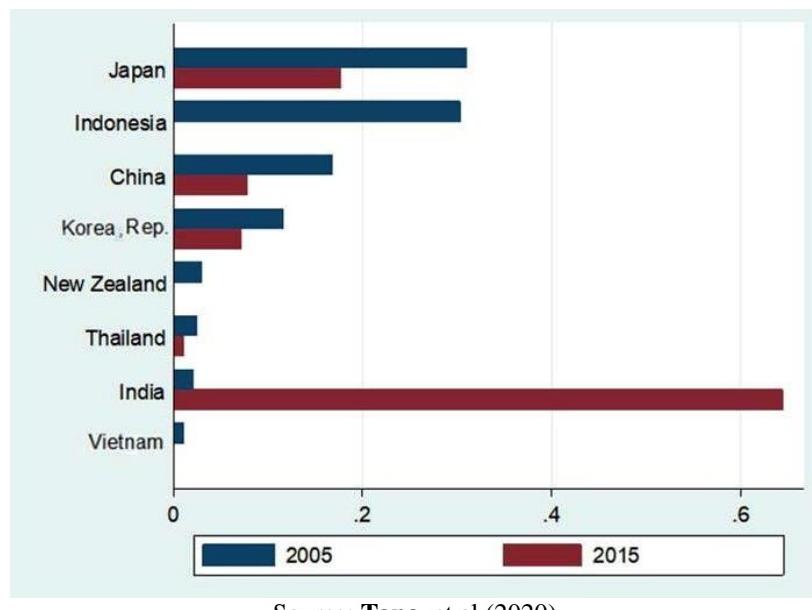
**Graph 13:** Nigerian & South African imports, 2012 – 2020



Source: ([Trading Economics](#))

Five ASEAN countries were represented in Nigeria: Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippine, Vietnam, and Thailand (Okeh, 2018). The two ASEAN members, Thailand and Vietnam, figured among the top Asian destinations of Nigeria's exports.

**Graph 14:** Top Asian destinations for Nigeria's exports, 2005 and 2015 (share)



Source: Tang, et al (2020)

Bilateral trade between Indonesia and Nigeria tripled between 2010 and 2014 (Tarrósy, 2016). Nigeria export to the main ASEAN import countries, Thailand and Indonesia, developed in the same direction and on the same level.

**Graph 15:** Indonesian - Nigerian trade, 2010 to 2014  
(in million US\$)

Year	Export	Import	Total Trade Value
2010	316.86	921.59	1,238.45
2011	465.99	1,626.87	2,092.86
2012	413.08	2,770.66	3,183.74
2013	558.17	3,122.45	3,680.62
2014	648.61	3,306.30	3,954.91

(Source: Indonesia Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS),  
Processed by Ministry of Trade)

Source: Tarrósy, 2016

**Graph 16:** Thailand and Indonesian imports compared, 2012-2020



Source: ([Trading Economics](#))

### 3.5 Egypt - ASEAN trade relations

Positioned next to key global trade routes, and close to Arabian, African, American, and European markets, Egypt is a gateway, linking Africa with Europe and Asia, last, but not least thanks to the Suez canal. Its position as a regional hub is also supported by its developed infrastructure. It is therefore no surprise that the country ASEAN member countries like Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia developed their foreign trade relations in recent times considerably. Moreover, there were close similarities between Nigeria and Egyptian foreign trade with ASEAN countries, for example concerning the export sector, and since the Corona crisis also concerning imports.

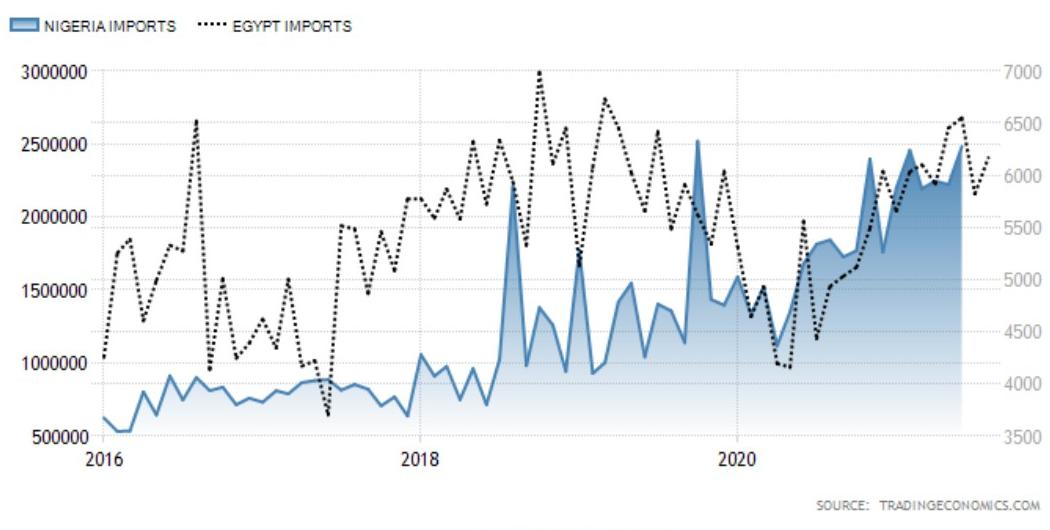
Egyptian media admired the development achievements of Vietnam and its role in the ASEAN region as well as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC) for 2020-2021. Egypt was the second largest trade partner of Vietnam in Africa, its bilateral trade attained USD 500 million (VNA, 2020). Overall trade between Egypt and Vietnam amounted to US\$ 491 million in 2019. Vietnamese exports to the Egyptian market were valued at US\$ 458 million, while the value of Vietnamese imports from Egypt reached US\$ 33 million (*Egypt Today* staff, 2020).

**Graph 17:** Nigerian & Egyptian exports, 2012 – 2020



Source: ([Trading Economics](#))

**Graph 18:** Nigerian & Egyptian imports, 2012 – 2020



Source: ([Trading Economics](#))

Also, Thailand discussed with Egypt ways to expand their bilateral relations in 2021. Both sides agreed to promote cooperation in key areas, namely, (1) education; (2) trade and investment; (3) tourism; (4) culture; and (5) fishery, which Egypt wishes to learn from Thailand's extensive experience and expertise (Thai's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2021)).

The same holds for Indonesia. Both countries arguably possessed the largest economic power in their respective regions, besides Israel. Egypt was the 26th largest export partner for Indonesia in 2018. The bilateral trade value reached US\$ 1.10 billion, from which Indonesia secured an US\$ 893,808.40 surplus.

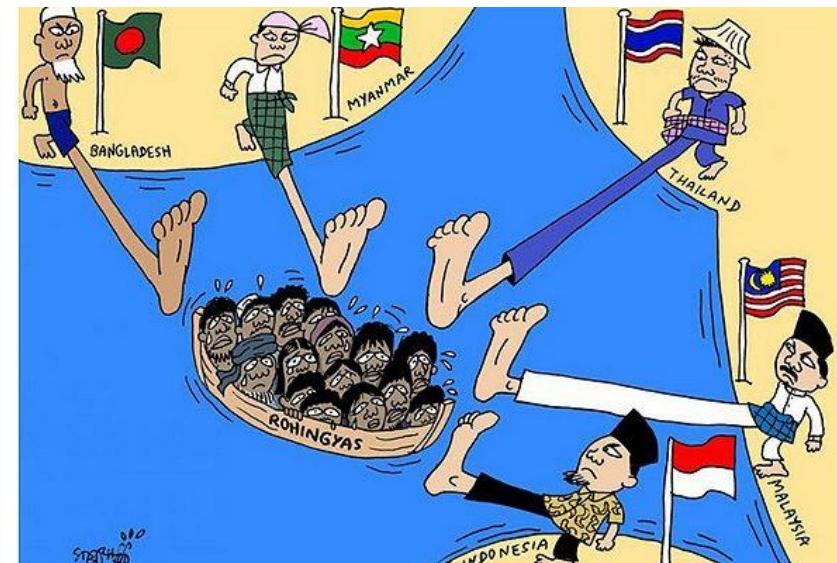
Indonesia-Egypt trade for 2017 totaled US\$ 1,253 billion, compared to US\$ 1,110 billion in 2016. Indonesian CPO exports to Egypt for 2017 were the highest with US\$ 1,505 billion, an

increase of nearly 3 % compared to 2016. Indonesia's main exports to Egypt included palm oil, tire products, thread, coffee, and automotive spare parts. Indonesian investment in Egypt in 2016 totaled roughly US\$ 50 million. Egypt could also develop to the entrance point for Indonesian palm oil to the African Market because Egypt had a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with some African countries (SAWIT, 2018).

Nearly 8,000 Indonesian citizens resided in Egypt, 6,229 of whom were higher education students, while 463 were working in the informal sector. Both governments established in 2019 a Collective Commission Trial, Joint Trade Committee, as well as other partnerships in fisheries, health, energy, and defense. To improve the market access for both countries' products, Indonesia and Egypt wanted to initiate Joint Feasibility Studies as the probation stage for their Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jakarta, 2019).

#### 4. Migration and ASEAN – African relations

**Cartoon 2: 'Asia boat migrants'**



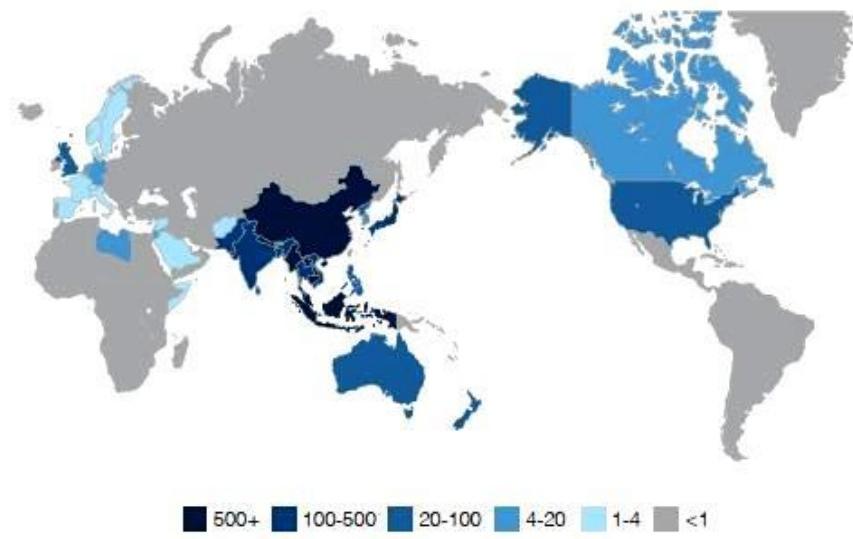
Source: BBC-news – Asia<sup>5</sup>

Labor migration became an important feature in Southeast Asia at the latest since the 1970s. State policies played a significant role in determining country-specific migration policies. Although most ASEAN countries also sent migrant workers to the Middle East and East Asia, ASEAN intra-regional migration was most important. Concerning the latter two patterns were to be distinguished (Yazid & Septiyana 2019): First, countries bordering the Mekong river, i.e. Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam, with Thailand as the major migrant destination. Second, the Malay Peninsula region of Brunei, Malaysia, and Singapore with migrant workers coming from Indonesia and the Philippines. Malaysia, for example, was a country relying on cheap labor for agriculture and manufacturing. Therefore, most migrants coming to Malaysia were semiskilled or unskilled laborers with low levels of education. Singapore was the first ASEAN country to impose a migrant labor policy for the manufacturing and personal service

<sup>5</sup> “[Asia boat migrants: Asean media troubled overtreatment](#)”, cartoon showing a boatload of Rohingyas being kicked away from the shores of Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia. N.A., *BBC-news*, 18 May 2015.

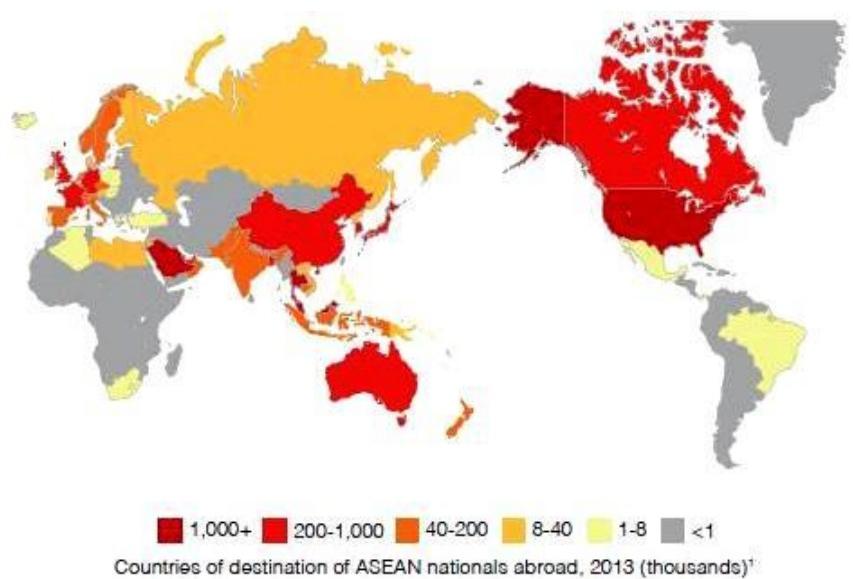
sector because of the menace of an over-aging population. Likewise, the majority of its migrant workers were unskilled. Many migrant laborers in the region were hired by private intermediaries that often demanded money for their services from the migrants. Also, ASEAN migrant workers were predominantly women, because, on the demand side, female job profiles, such as nurses, domestic servants, caregivers, and hotel services prevailed (Yazid & Septiyana 2019).

**Graph 19:** Where do international migrants in ASEAN come from?



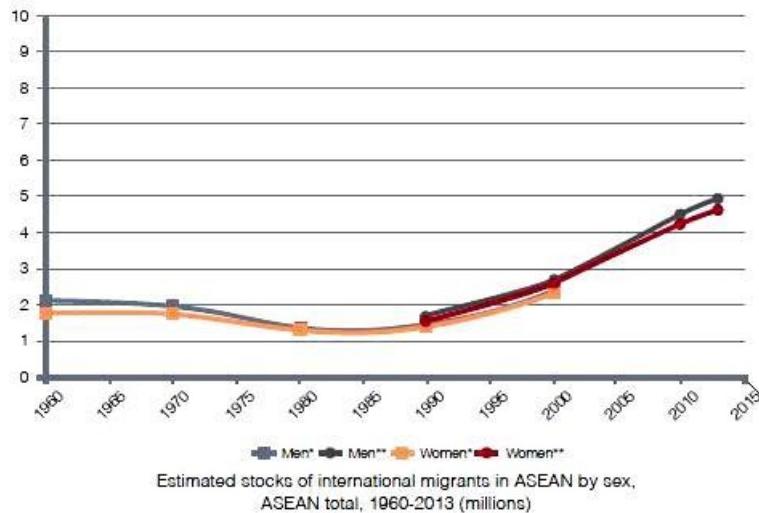
Source: ILO: [Countries of Origin and Destination for Migrants in ASEAN](#)  
The International Labour Migration Statistics (ILMS) Database for ASEAN

**Graph 20:** Where do ASEAN nationals migrate to?



Source: ILO: [Countries of Origin and Destination for Migrants in ASEAN](#)  
ILMS Database for ASEAN

**Graph 21:** International migrant women and men in ASEAN, 1960-2015

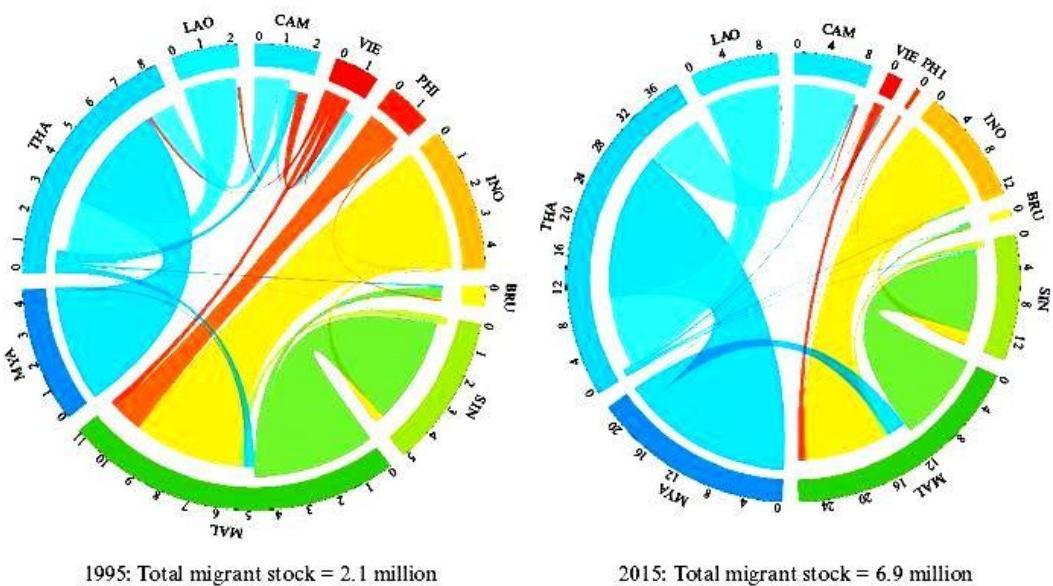


Source: ILO: [Countries of Origin and Destination for Migrants in ASEAN](#)  
ILMS Database for ASEAN

In the beginning, ASEAN's migrant labor policy was governed by its neo-liberal economic orientation to complement its open trade and investment strategy, for example by encouraging services trade. According to this 'market-orientation ideology which was an integral part of the AEC, the free movement of labor guaranteed best the efficient and productive use of human capital. Moreover, it furthered the transfer of knowledge within the region, e.g. by attracting, retaining, and circulating ASEAN's skilled workforce employing specific regulations, e.g. to ease the movement of students, skilled professionals, and tourists. The ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services (AFAS) had been signed already in 1997, and the complementing ASEAN Agreement on the Movement of Natural Persons in 2012 to further liberalize services trade across the region. However, the agreements were never implemented. ASEAN intra-regional flows were due largely to bilateral arrangements between source- and host countries and labor and immigration laws of host countries, rather than ASEAN-wide initiatives (Kikkawa & Suan, 2019).

The extent and scale of governance were quite different concerning high-skilled and low-skilled labor. The unequal resources and bargaining power of ASEAN source and host countries lead to correspondingly uneven governance measures. Moreover, the progress and depth of governance were very uneven, stretching from top-down to bottom-up responses (Rother, 2019). Migration had mostly been driven by higher wages and migrant social networks in host economies and natural disasters in origin countries. In the 2010<sup>th</sup>, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand were desperately trying to stop the influx of migrants from Myanmar and Bangladesh. Thus, the Indonesian navy turned away migrant boats. However, it would be unfair to blame only the government of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. Myanmar and Bangladesh, as well as ASEAN, had been responsible as well because of their silence on human rights violations, e.g. the Myanmar regime's systematic discrimination against the Rohingya. On the other hand, Thai media considered human trafficking as a key factor for certain superpowers to put pressure on the Bangkok government through trade measures (BBC-news, 2015).

**Graph 22:** Migration within ASEAN member countries, 1995 and 2015<sup>6</sup>



Note: BRU = Brunei Darussalam; CAM = Cambodia; INDO = Indonesia; LAO = Lao People's Democratic Republic; MAL = Malaysia; MYA = Myanmar; PHL = Philippines; SIN = Singapore; THA = Thailand; VIE = Viet Nam.

Source: Authors' rendering based on Abel et al. (2014), using the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2015) database, Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Destination and Origin (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2015).

Source: Kikkawa, Aiko & Eric B. Suan 2019:7

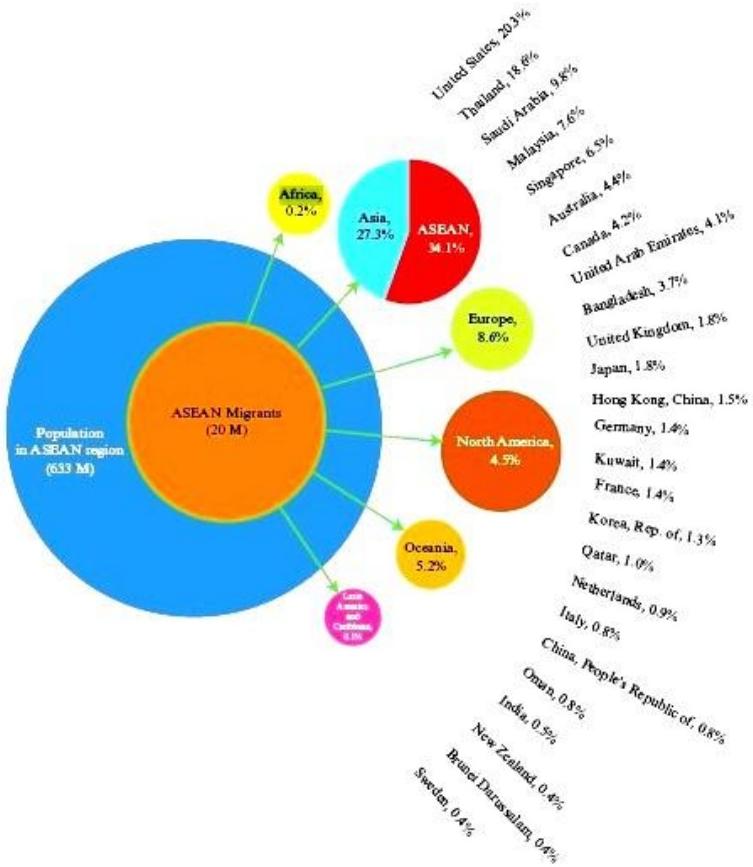
Much of the migration was legal, but a growing part of it took place outside the control of the national governments (Spaan & Naerssen, 2018). An increasing number of migrants were living in a state of indefinite ‘transit’. They were deeply affected by the uncertain and insecure situation. Nevertheless, many of them tried to overcome these conditions and pursue their conceptions of life, such as getting married, having children, becoming part of the local community, and working towards a better future. The conceptualization of transit as life in limbo did not exactly account for such permanent, life-changing experiences (Sampson & Gifford, 2016).

Migrant’s transit sites in Indonesia for migrants aiming at going to Australia illustrated those border crossings were exploited not only in illicit spaces but also when under government control or management by international organizations. The economies of transit encouraged informal networks preying on transit migrants to extend their exploitation (Phillips & Missbach, 2017). Three structural elements were likely to drive more intra-ASEAN migration in foreseeable future: demographic transition, the large income discrepancies between ASEAN economies, and the porosity of borders (Tuccio, 2017).

The number of migrants moving across ASEAN territory increased substantially over the past decades. Intra-ASEAN migration tripled from 2.1 million in 1995 to 6.9 million in 2015. Its share of total migrants into ASEAN increased from 57.6 % in 1995 to 70.0 % in 2015 (Kikkawa & Suan, 2019). However, the number of people seeking refuge in ASEAN from outside sources decreased by nearly half from 437,530 in 1980 to 284,949 in 2015, and the variety of nationalities was more diverse now than ever before.

<sup>6</sup> The circles show patterns of intra-ASEAN migration in 1995 and 2015. They are based on UN bilateral migration stock data. Each strip or line represents the proportionate volume and direction of migration (in stock) from source (outer circle) to host (inner circle) (Kikkawa & Suan, 2019:7).

**Graph 23: ASEAN skilled labor mobility and migration outside the region (2015)**



Note: M = million people.

Source: Authors' calculations using the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs database (2015), Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Destination and Origin (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2015).

Source: Kikkawa, Aiko & Eric B. Suan (2019)

In general, almost 80 % of South-South migration took place between countries with contiguous borders. One of the major driving forces was the search for better income that could be shared with the family left home. Estimates of South-South remittances ranged from 9 % to 30 % of source countries' remittance receipts in 2005. It is worth mentioning that the impact of South-South migration on the income of migrants generally was smaller than for South-North migration, and the cost of South-South remittances was even higher than those of North-South remittances. Nevertheless, even slight increases in income could have substantial welfare effects for the poor. Finally, the costs of South-South remittances are even higher than those of North-South remittances (Ratha & Shaw, 2006).

Malaysia, for example, became a country of asylum for forced migrants originating overwhelmingly from Africa, e.g. from Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Algeria, Guinea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, and Senegal, but also from Bhutan, Iran, Iraq, and Kuwait. Similar trends of forced migration appeared in Thailand and Indonesia, which saw a greater diversification of nationalities compared to the period before the 1990s. ASEAN would be well advised to establish strategic cooperation, focused on forced migration problems with the [African Union](#), [African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights](#) (ACHPR), and the [Organisation of Islamic Cooperation](#) (OIC) (Wahab, 2017). ASEAN countries with net migrant inflows were Brunei,

Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. Among the economies with net outflows figured Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Vietnam (Kikkawa & Suan, 2019). Migrants from SSA, for example in Thailand, were handicapped furthermore by the lack of Thai language speaking ability and limited access to health care. Moreover, the latter was due to lack of cross-cultural competency and mistrust of Thai health care personnel, and absence of translation services at most Thai health facilities (Gonah, 2016).

## 5. Conclusion

Analyzing the economic performance of ASEAN member states in Africa is complicated because of ASEAN's and Africa's strong political, economical, social, and cultural diversity. Onedimensional answers would be misleading. Country case studies showed to provide a compelling alternative. In-depth studies of the performance of the New Asia-Africa Strategic Partnership (NAASP), taking the example of two ASEAN countries (Indonesia and Thailand) as well as three African countries (South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt), revealed valuable insights.

Although contentious positions on human rights violations of the autocratic military regime in Myanmar and the differing demands on the suzerainty about the South China Sea hampered ASEAN inner-political relations this had little or no effect on ASEAN African relations. Whereas in times of the cold war the solidarity between suppressed 'third world nations' and colonies welded quasi 'natural' bonds between Asia and Africa, as crystallized in the Bandung-declaration, this feeling of a common destiny dwindled afterward. The establishment of the New Asian-African Strategic Partnership (NAASP) in 2005 aimed at revitalizing the Bandung spirit of the non-aligned movement, with a stronger focus on the mutual benefits of economic cooperation. ASEAN-Africa trade grew from just US \$ 2.8 billion in 1990 to US \$ 42.5 billion in 2012, increasing on average by 14% per year.

However, given the shift of global political and military power networks from the Atlantic to the Pacific region, and because of the rapid development of ASEAN member countries against the sluggish African growth, as well as permanent political and security crisis in SSA, the interest of ASEAN investors and traders in their African counterparts faded.

Also, the Corona pandemic and associated effects, like the subsequent supply chain disruptions, impacted severely on overall GDP growth, employment, foreign trade, and well-being, both in ASEAN and Africa (Kohnert, 2021; 2021a). By November 2020, the number of recognized COVID-19 cases in the 10 ASEAN states had crossed one million. Indonesia and the Philippines took the lead with more than 440,500 and 398,400 cases. Confirmed Corona-related deaths at that time were more than 24,100, most of them in Indonesia (Vu, 2020). Later on, Vietnam was the hardest hit by COVID-19, especially since the ongoing fourth wave started end of April 2021, with many socioeconomic activities coming to a halt for months, or at least having been disrupted from time to time. China provided ASEAN member states, including Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, with over 300 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines as well as a great number of emergency medical supplies (Xinhua, 2021a). In summer 2021, ASEAN countries began to reopen their economies and borders following receding economic and social activities during the COVID-19 outbreak. However, the actual impact on ASEAN – African relations has not yet been analyzed due to the lack of reliable data. All in all, these developments rendered the perspectives of ASEAN-African cooperation, including the NAASP, less promising in the foreseeable future.

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**Résumé :** *Relations commerciales entre l'ASEAN [ANASE] et l'Afrique: vers un partenariat renouvelé ?* --- Le sommet de l'ASEAN d'octobre 2021 a montré l'importance géopolitique accrue de la région indo-pacifique. Aujourd'hui, l'ANASE est l'organisation régionale la plus performante d'Asie et la deuxième au monde derrière l'UE. La création du Nouveau partenariat stratégique Asie-Afrique (NAASP) plus de 15 ans auparavant (2005) visait à raviver l'esprit de Bandung du mouvement des non-alignés de 1955. Cette fois en mettant davantage l'accent sur les liens économiques. En 2013, ces pays comptaient environ 620 millions d'habitants soit 8,8% de la population mondiale. Ils voulaient combattre le colonialisme et le néocolonialisme en promouvant la coopération économique et culturelle afro-asiatique. Presque tous les pays membres ont acquis leur souveraineté et leur indépendance politique dans les années 1960 et 1970, à l'exception de la Palestine. Cependant, les conséquences de la conférence de Bandung ont également favorisé des développements négatifs, notamment la polarisation des pays asiatiques, le renforcement de l'autoritarisme politique et les interventions régionales. En outre, la plupart des pays ont continué à faire face à des défis économiques et politiques, notamment la pauvreté, le fardeau de la dette, le retard, l'ignorance, la maladie et la dégradation de l'environnement. Leur accès aux marchés des pays industrialisés restait également limité. Au niveau mondial, le NAASP a reçu peu d'attention jusqu'à présent. Malgré la rhétorique de longue date de la solidarité Asie-Afrique, l'Asie et l'Afrique manquent encore de liens institutionnels et commerciaux formels. Bien que le commerce interrégional ait augmenté, l'Afrique est restée une petite partie de l'ASEAN avec seulement environ 2% de son marché total. Les principaux pays commerçants de l'ASEAN avec l'Afrique étaient la Thaïlande, l'Indonésie et Singapour, tandis que l'Afrique du Sud, le Nigeria et l'Égypte étaient les plus grands marchés d'importation africains.

**Zusammenfassung :** *Handelsbeziehungen zwischen ASEAN und Afrika: Aufbruch zu einer erneuerten Partnerschaft ?* ---- Der ASEAN-Gipfel vom Oktober 2021 zeigte die zunehmende geopolitische Bedeutung des Indopazifischen Raums. Heute ist ASEAN die erfolgreichste Regionalorganisation in Asien und die zweitgrößte weltweit hinter der EU. Die Gründung der New Asian-African Strategic Partnership (NAASP) vor mehr als 15 Jahren (2005) hatte das Ziel, den Bandung-Geist der blockfreien Bewegung von 1955 wiederzubeleben. Diesmal mit einem stärkeren Fokus auf wirtschaftliche Verbindungen. Im Jahr 2013 zählten diese Länder rund 620 Millionen Einwohner oder 8,8 % der Weltbevölkerung. Sie wollten Kolonialismus und Neokolonialismus bekämpfen, indem sie die afro-asiatische wirtschaftliche und kulturelle Zusammenarbeit förderten. Fast alle Mitgliedsländer, mit Ausnahme Palästinas, erlangten in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren Souveränität und politische Unabhängigkeit. Die Nachwirkungen der Bandung-Konferenz förderten jedoch auch negative Entwicklungen, darunter die Polarisierung asiatischer Länder, die Stärkung des politischen Autoritarismus und regionale Interventionen. Darüber hinaus kämpften die meisten Länder weiterhin mit wirtschaftlichen und politischen Herausforderungen, darunter Armut, Schuldenlast, Rückständigkeit, Ignoranz, Krankheiten und Umweltzerstörung. Auch ihr Zugang zu den Märkten der Industrieländer blieb begrenzt. Auf globaler Ebene wurde der NAASP bisher wenig Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt. Trotz der langjährigen Rhetorik der Solidarität zwischen Asien und Afrika fehlt es Asien und Afrika immer noch an formellen institutionellen und handelspolitischen Verbindungen. Obwohl der interregionale Handel zunahm, blieb Afrika ein kleiner Teil der ASEAN mit nur rund 2 % seines Gesamtmarktes. Die wichtigsten Handelsländer der ASEAN mit Afrika waren Thailand, Indonesien und Singapur, während Südafrika, Nigeria und Ägypten die größten afrikanischen Importmärkte waren.